

**Kreutzer, R. (1993). Investigation of possible Butte County disease cluster, California  
Department of Health Services, Environmental Health Investigations Branch.**

**SUMMARY**

At the request of local residents and the Butte County Department of Public Health, the Department of Health Services (DHS) investigated symptom reports collected by citizens from Chico and the surrounding area. Over 100 residents suspect that their symptoms are produced by a single disease, that they share that same disease, and that an environmental factor is the cause.

The investigation included:

- 1) conducting a public meeting to obtain direct testimony on symptoms;
- 2) contacting local health care providers of some of the cases as well as contacting experts in infectious diseases, tropical medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, toxicology, psychiatry, and multiple chemical sensitivity/environmental illness;
- 3) analyzing 79 self-administered questionnaires (designed and distributed by two members of the affected group) from residents who believe they experienced the same disease.

Questionnaire analysis demonstrates a wide range of symptoms reported by each respondent (4-36 symptoms), with weakness, headache, symptom cycling, depression, forgetfulness, problems with sleep, and anxiety being the most frequently reported. Cases range in age from 5 to 81 years old. There are almost three times as many females in the group as males. Cases do not residentially or temporally cluster, nor do they frequently share kinship or occupation. A subset of the group from Chico Unified School District and a smaller subset from Hooker Oak Elementary School did not demonstrate any more specificity of symptoms or case characteristics than the whole group.

Although the symptom questionnaire did not include questions about chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), other factors indicate this syndrome is an unlikely common explanation for peoples' illnesses.

The analysis suggests that the symptom reports are not representative of one common disease. Based on the limited information available, the cases do not appear to share a common exposure or characteristic which explains the range of presenting symptoms. Local health providers and medical experts corroborate these conclusions.